

# Students experiencing and developing democratic citizenship through curriculum negotiation: the relevance of Garth Boomer's approach.

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## **Abstract**

When students are involved in curriculum design they offer unique perspectives that improve the quality and relevance of the curriculum. The processes involved in negotiating their curriculum give school and university students possibilities to practice, experience and develop the abilities to participate as citizens of a democratic society. Enabling students to have a role in curriculum design requires that the curriculum is regarded as a process instead of a predetermined, externally established product. Treating the curriculum as a process supports teachers to co-create the curriculum together with students based on broad principles or aims, but with greater freedom for students to negotiate the content and methods of learning.

In the 1980s the concept of curriculum negotiation was developed by the Australian curriculum specialist Garth Boomer and colleagues. We explore Boomer's ideas about curriculum negotiation and how his approach can: 1) enable students to become meaningful agents in curriculum design; 2) integrate student voice into the curriculum, and foster a more democratic educational environment; and 3) develop specific citizenship skills and graduate attributes.

We demonstrate the potential application of Boomer's curriculum negotiation approach to current school and university settings and make comparisons with other related democratic citizenship education and curriculum approaches.

**Key words:** curriculum negotiation, student – teacher partnership, process curriculum, democratic citizenship education.

## 1. Introduction

The history of curriculum theory, policy and practice, suggests that different approaches to curriculum development have been taken and normalised at different stages in the past but Green (2003) argues that we do not always improve upon previous thinking and practice. This means that occasionally valuable contributions from curriculum scholars have been overlooked, at least from our European perspective. One such author is Garth Boomer. Green (2003: 126) claims that "Boomer's explorations of the theory and practice of curriculum negotiation represent a distinctive contribution to the field", and yet we argue in this paper these explorations have been under-utilised in curriculum theory and practice in current secondary and higher education settings. In this article we demonstrate how curriculum negotiation can be included in contemporary educational change.

School can be regarded as a 'site for citizenship' (Hoskins, Janmaat & Villalba, 2012; Bron & Veugelers, 2014a, 2014b), a place to practice and develop abilities and experience the values necessary to sustain a democratic society. Also many universities in recent years have explicitly stated the 'graduate attributes' they wish their students to develop and attention paid to these attributes frequently provide opportunities and experiences to enable students to develop 'global citizenship' (Haigh & Clifford, 2010). Yet many schools and universities in various countries struggle to identify opportunities for students to learn about democracy by practicing democratic principles. A promising approach is to promote the participation of students in decision-making about school or university affairs for a variety of reasons such as the promotion of student agency, motivation and participation. This is apparent in recent curriculum renewals in the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand amongst others (Sinnema & Aitken, 2013) but also in countries such as The Netherlands (Platform onderwijs 2032, 2015) and Finland (Horvathova, 2015). This approach is increasingly being seen and that is often accompanied by a lexicon of partnership, student leadership, student agency and student voice (Rodgers, Freeman, Williams & Kane, 2011; Sinnema & Aitken, 2013; Black & Groundwater-Smith, 2014).

There are many examples of student participation in schools and universities, but in most of these examples participation is restricted to a select group of students. Often, opportunities are not used by harder to reach groups that we want to involve so they too can experience and develop democratic qualities (Fielding, 2001; Felten, Bagg, Bumbry, Hill, Hornsby, Pratt & Weller, 2013; Kandiko & Weyers, 2013; Zipin, 2013). It has been argued that only those students participating recognize the benefits of participation (Könings, Brand-Gruwel & Merrienboer, 2011). Therefore participation opportunities in a classroom setting with all students involved might be considered preferable over the representative approach taken by student councils that involves participation of selected individuals and groups. Involving students in decision making about their class curriculum is a way of enabling all students to experience and develop participative skills and democratic abilities. Zipin described this relation as a 'double-democracy of both curriculum and of pedagogy' (Zipin, 2013: 10). However examples of students participating in curriculum decision making are scarce. In our search for both a theoretical basis for, and practical examples of, a negotiated curriculum, we discovered the work of Garth Boomer. His work appears to have received little attention outside of his own country, Australia, but consistent with Green (2003), we found the work of Boomer to be useful and informative and consider that it deserves more attention within a variety of present day curricular developments such as 'negotiated curriculum', 'student voice' and 'democratic citizenship'. In addition, Boomer has potential value within the current growth of interest in 'students as partners' and 'co-creation of the curriculum' in higher education in the UK, USA and elsewhere (Bovill, 2013; Bovill, 2014; Cook-Sather, Bovill & Felten, 2014; Healey, Flint & Harrington, 2014).

This article presents an analysis of the work of Garth Boomer on curriculum negotiation and relates this to a number of developments in present day schools and higher education.

Boomer developed an approach in which teacher and students work together to negotiate their curriculum (Boomer, 1978; Boomer, 1982; Boomer, Lester, Onore & Cook, 1992). We argue that although now over 30 years old, this model is still valuable in both schools and

university education today and can contribute to ensuring all student voices are integrated into curricular developments as well as to the development of democratic citizenship education in schools (Zipin, 2013; Bron & Veugelers, 2014a) and to the development of 'graduate attributes' in universities (Cook-Sather et al, 2014). This work is likely to be of interest to teachers and curriculum designers focused on secondary and higher education because next to the development of democratic abilities, curriculum negotiation has been demonstrated to contribute to beneficial outcomes for both students and teachers in the form of: enhanced engagement; improved learning and teaching experiences; and enhanced meta-cognitive understanding of learning and teaching (Cook-Sather et al, 2014).

In this article we present some of the key values underpinning Boomer's work: A) the development of a democratic society with a democratic citizenry, B) the curriculum as a process, and C) the curriculum as a jointly enacted composition. We then explore how these values relate to current discussions in schools and universities about: how students can practise and practice citizenship attributes and capabilities through a more democratic process oriented curriculum; and how student voices can contribute to the curriculum as a jointly enacted composition. We also explore how Boomer's values and principles can translate into practical approaches to negotiating curricula.

## **2. Introduction to Garth Boomer and negotiated curriculum**

The late Garth Boomer started his career as a teacher of English in Australia and contributed significantly to improving English Language didactics and pedagogy (Green & Meiers, 2013). He held several positions in his career among which was Director of Wattle Park Teachers Centre; Director of the Curriculum Development Centre and Chairman of the Commonwealth Schools Commission. He was one of the driving forces behind the establishment of the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA). Up until his early death in 1993 Boomer was involved in national curriculum developments and debates and chaired a range of curriculum committees working towards national curriculum statements. He was one of the

scholars that started a tradition of curriculum thinking in Australia and one of Australia's major contributors to the advancement of school based curriculum development (Green, 2003). An award still exists in his name and the opening key note address at ACSA's bi-annual conference is also named in his honor.

Boomer first wrote an article on 'negotiating the curriculum' (Boomer, 1978) followed by two books that build upon ideas from the article and that focus explicitly on curriculum negotiation. The books were 'Negotiating the curriculum: A teacher – student partnership' (Boomer, 1982), in which he presented the curriculum negotiation model and its foundations, and ten years later, 'Negotiating the curriculum: Education for the 21st century' (Boomer et al, 1992). In the 1992 publication, the ideas from the 1982 book re-appear but are taken to a higher theoretical and international level with additional contributions from the USA and the UK. Similar to the 1982 edition, the later book offers a combination of theory and examples from practitioners.

Boomer developed a rationale and an approach, which gives learners greater voice in curriculum matters. The 'curriculum negotiation' model for learning and teaching grew out of the question: "How do people learn, and what does this imply for our teaching?" (Boomer 1982: iix). Boomer's curriculum negotiation approach is a good example of enabling and enacting student participation and student voice within curriculum design, but he recognised that this can be challenging: "it is (...) very difficult for teachers to share their power with students, because society and schools are not based on such a philosophy" (Boomer, 1992a: 7). Boomer emphasised that a curriculum should not be seen as a product consisting of content, activities, methods and outcomes, but as a process. His ideal was "the formation of a collaborative radical democracy which values enquiry and negotiation as essential elements in the progress of civilization" (1992b: 277). He playfully uses the verb "curriculuming" for this, to imply action and process (1992c: 32). According to the invitation to nominate people and work for the Garth Boomer Award, by the editors of the Curriculum

Perspectives Journal (2012), important elements of Boomer's view about the students' role in curriculum design are: "curriculum intentions should be made explicit to students; students should be 'actors', not just be 'acted upon'; curriculum, including assessment, must involve collaboration between teacher and student; and power relationships in the classroom, school or system should be examined".

Boomer described the negotiation of the curriculum as: "the deliberate planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational programme, so that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes. Negotiation also means making explicit, and then confronting, the constraints of the learning context and the non-negotiable requirements that apply" (Boomer, 1992a: 14). He continues, "The curriculum is no longer a pre-packaged course to be taken; it is a jointly enacted composition that grows and changes as it proceeds" (Boomer, 1982: 150). With this definition Boomer is explicit in acknowledging the contextual limitations to curriculum negotiation involving, for example, externally stipulated curriculum requirements, limitations of time, materials and other resources. Neglecting the aspirations and purposes of the learners leads, according to Boomer (1992a: 2), to a "clash of intentions". Certainly teachers are skilled in motivating students to learn, but often risk ignoring the learning power of their students, and their accompanying intrinsic motivation. The motivation model, needs as Boomer suggests to be replaced by a negotiation model whereby the content, teaching methods and evaluation tools occur as a result of negotiation between the teacher and the students. In the words of Cook, 1992: 16) The negotiation model is "our best chance of maximising the learning productivity of the classroom".

In this article we argue that Boomer's ideas about curriculum negotiation are still viable and relevant in education today. We have extracted three key ideas from Boomer's work that illustrate the underpinning ethos of Boomer's negotiated curriculum approach. These provide

us with three underpinning principles that we then use to frame our arguments throughout the rest of this article:

- A. Education can contribute to a more just society by modelling "the formation of a collaborative democracy which values inquiry and negotiation" (Boomer, 1992b: 277). This implies the development of citizens with democratic abilities to collaborate, negotiate and enquire.
- B. "Curriculum(ing) implies action and should not be seen as a product consisting of content, activities, methods and outcomes, but as a process" (Boomer, 1992c: 32).
- C. "Curriculum intentions should be made explicit to students, students should be 'actors', curriculum (...) must involve collaboration between teacher and student" (Curriculum Perspectives, 2012: 13-14). The curriculum is "a jointly enacted composition that grows and changes as it proceeds" (Boomer, 1982: 150).

### **3. Placing Boomer in context**

Boomer did not emphasise the relationship between his work and that of other curriculum scholars. His first book on curriculum negotiation published in 1982 cites only nine references that have 'informed or inspired the writers'. This changed with the publication of the second, more international edition from 1992, but even that edition contains relatively few references. We see the same pattern in the reception of Boomer's work. Boomer's work does not seem to have been widely known or cited by others, even by those whose ideas or practices are very much related to his work. In the following section we attempt to relate the work of Boomer and his colleagues to the work of international authors writing about curriculum and stressing the importance of the aforementioned underpinning principles. We will show how the three underpinning principles we found in Boomer's work relate to four key areas of contemporary educational discourse: the development of a democratic society (see 3.1), students' development as democratic citizens (3.2), curriculum as a process (3.3) and student voice (3.4).



### ***3.1 The development of a democratic society***

Boomer was aware of the key role that education plays in the development of culture, society and democratic values (principle A), and certainly Boomer is not alone in expressing societal ideals within a rationale for curriculum planning. We briefly present the work of scholars whose views are consistent with and enriching to Boomer's curriculum negotiation approach and its democratic values.

The British scholar Kelly (2009) has analysed developments in the English (general education) curriculum policy for decades and noticed an increase in government control of the curriculum and a reduction in school based curriculum development. He makes a strong plea for viewing the curriculum as a process and education as developmental (principle B), in contrast to the dominant objectives and content focused model of curriculum found in schools and universities as a result of stronger government control. He sees education primarily as a process of (individual) growth. Kelly argues that in a democratic society there is no place for a top down, over-specified national schools' curriculum. He regards a prescribed curriculum as fundamentally totalitarian and far from democratic. Instead he argues that a national curriculum should be limited to a set of fundamental principles that educators take as a starting point for their planning and a way of evaluating their teaching. Like Boomer, Kelly argues that in a democratic society, students have the right to comment on, and contribute to, the curriculum (see principle C). He acknowledges that students are far from being a homogeneous group: "to impose one body of knowledge, one culture, one set of values on all pupils regardless of their origins, their social class, race or creed is to risk at best, offering them a curriculum that is irrelevant, meaningless and alienating" (Kelly, 2009: 248).

Some of the ideas we found in Boomer's work are also present in the work of the philosopher of education Noddings (2013), who envisions an education that can improve the societies we live in by developing a collaborative democracy (principle A). In Noddings' view this means

changing the current emphasis on competition and replacing it with cooperation. Therefore critical thinking and creativity need to be brought back as aims within our education system. Noddings describes a number of ways to increase cooperation, which are also crucial aspects of negotiation: "competent deliberation is best learned through participation and dialogue" (Noddings, 2013: 131). Educational institutions need to have the space and opportunities to become more democratically organized and this includes viewing the curriculum as a process (principle B). "Policymakers and subject-matter experts should be reminded that it is not their province to prescribe exactly what should be taught at every grade level in every class to every student" (Noddings, 2013: 146). Like Boomer, Noddings argues that "at every stage of development, as the prescribed curriculum is filled out interactively, much new material will be added as teacher and students discuss the initial material" (Noddings, 2013: 147), and students can build on individual interests by undertaking projects (see principle C).

The sociologists of education Apple and Beane (1995) contest the idea of "high status knowledge as though it were 'truth' arisen from some immutable, infallible source" (13). Students must be encouraged to ask questions about curriculum content such as: "Who says this? Why did they say it? Why should we believe this? Who benefits if we believe this and act upon it?" (Apple & Beane, 1995: 14). These critical questions that we consider an element of a more democratic society (principle A) are key to ensuring there are different voices within learning, and this aligns well with the concern to enhance student voices within learning, and *that curricula should be considered a jointly enacted composition* (principle C). A democratic curriculum includes not only what teachers think is important, but also the questions and concerns that students have about themselves and their world. A democratic curriculum invites students to shed the passive role of knowledge consumers and assume the active role of 'meaning makers' highlighting that *students should be actors* (principle C). Beane (1997) argues for curriculum integration, and his conclusions about education, democracy and the role of students strongly overlap with Boomer's work. Beane claims that:

"Schools have an obligation to promote democratic social integration through persistent use of democratic practices such as heterogeneous grouping, participatory planning, and collaborative problem solving" (Beane, 1997: 95) (principle A). He also claims that "Young people have a democratic right to participate in planning the school curriculum and to have their ideas taken seriously" (Beane, 1997: 95) and that the concerns students have about themselves and society deserve a central place in a meaningful curriculum (principle C).

The main argument of these authors is that democratic education can be much more than just focussing on institutional culture. It can also imply inviting students to participate in negotiating the curriculum as a practical illustration and application of democratic processes within the class.

### **3.2 The development of Democratic citizens**

A democratic society should be made up of democratic citizens. Many societies are stressing the importance of education in counteracting threats to our open, democratic societies. Therefore citizenship education has become an international movement (Schulz, Ainley, Fraillon, Kerr & Losito, 2010; Eurydice, 2012). According to a recent study on Citizenship education (Eurydice, 2012) that included 31 countries in Europe, citizenship is featured in all national schools curricula, either as a subject, cross curricular issue or by having the school function as a place where students learn citizenship from experience. The concept of citizenship is in particular used in general education, but in universities the development of citizenship skills and other 'graduate attributes' has risen up the agenda in recent years (Barrie, 2007, Haigh & Clifford, 2010, Veugelers, De Groot & Nollet, 2014; Leask, 2015). In a curriculum proposal for *citizenship education* in primary and secondary schools, developed by the Dutch National Curriculum Institute (SLO), citizenship education is based on three domains: identity development, participation and democratic principles (Bron, Veugelers & Van Vliet, 2009). Student participation and voice is a way of students experiencing and developing democratic attitudes in education. At the same time, it follows article 12 of the

United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) which states that “States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” (UNHCR, 2015). We consider curriculum negotiation a means to provide students with opportunities to practice 'citizenship-as-practice' as opposed to 'citizenship-as-status' (Lawy & Biesta, 2006). Surely citizenship education includes a body of knowledge and cognitive skills, but citizenship must also be learned by enacting behaviors in daily situations within and outside the institution.

Less formal educational activities benefit students, and practices that are a kind of situated learning can lead to the development of democratic attitudes (Hoskins et al, 2012). We regard student voice and negotiation as examples of what Boomer calls collaborative democracy (principle A) and students as actors (principle C). Beane adds to the curriculum negotiation work of Boomer by emphasising the importance of the development of a range of skills stating that "the participation in collaborative planning is a critical citizenship skill in a democratic society" (Beane, 1997: 96). Zipin (2013) applied curriculum negotiation in the perspective of 'funds of knowledge' where students' backgrounds and life experiences are seen as culturally valuable and rich and are integrated into the curriculum. While in higher education, Cook-Sather et al (2014) and Jarvis, Dickerson & Stockwell (2013) argue that student-teacher partnerships in learning and teaching can enhance students' opportunities to develop a range of graduate attributes. The education system can enhance a democratic society by the way it is organized, but we can also argue that students acquire certain skills and attitudes to contribute to democratic societies through their active participation in their school and in the learning process. In a report on student leadership for example, Black et al (2014) state that international policy expresses the intent for students to have an active role in decision making and democratic processes in schools. The authors articulate that this "follows a longstanding policy tradition that frames schools as institutions that serve a set of

agreed public purposes, including the development of young people's ability to participate as citizens and as leaders in their schools and communities" (Black et al, 2014: 7).

### ***3.3 Curriculum as a process***

Boomer considers the curriculum not as a fixed and prescribed document, but as a flexible and adaptable process that involves different stakeholders but especially teachers and students (principle B). In curriculum theory, the notion that the curriculum must be a flexible and adaptable process, arose as a reaction to the 'Tyler rational' (Flinders & Thornton, 2013). Ralph Tyler's work was influential in creating an idea of the curriculum as a 'plan for learning', a clear sequence of steps delivering the purposes that society, universities or schools seek to attain (Tyler, 1949). However this way of reasoning is naïve and unrelated to the complex messy reality of educational practices and learning experiences. The development of students and curricula cannot be organized and managed in a technical-instrumental way as if it were an assembly line (Grundy, 1987).

Since its appearance, the Tyler rationale has been criticized by many key curriculum scholars including Bruner, Eisner and Greene (Flinders & Thornton, 2013), while others criticise product and output focused curricula (Barnett & Coate, 2005). Maxine Greene advocated that existing school programmes are largely irrelevant to the existential desires for meaning and direction salient in the lives of young people (Greene, 1971). She argued for the development of skills above the acquisition of knowledge, recommending that education offers students opportunities for self-discovery. Eisner who regarded curriculum development as a practical and artistic undertaking (Eisner, 1979: xi) goes so far as to claim that the quality of the curriculum can only be determined by watching the teacher and the students in class. He critiqued the 'objectives-first' sequence in curriculum, arguing that the rationality of teaching is more dynamic, more interactive, and less mechanistic. Eisner also believed all ends cannot be planned and predicted in the development of the learner and his/her curiosity and inventiveness (Flinders & Thornton, 2013).

Boomer's vision of the curriculum is that it should not be seen as a product consisting of content, activities, methods and outcomes, but as a process in which teachers invite students as actors into a negotiation process to undertake 'curriculuming' within their class. This corresponds with Greene's self-discovery and Eisner's assertion that not everything in education can be planned in advance. Therefore, even though on the system level, "curriculum is an official statement of what students are expected to know and be able to do" (Levin, 2008: 8), at the institution and classroom levels, the curriculum can mean much more. Nieto, Bode, Kang & Raible (2008) for example, use a much broader interpretation of curriculum in schools that includes: "instructional materials, programs, projects, physical environments for learning, interactions among teachers and students, and all the intended and unintended messages about expectations, hopes, and dreams that students, their communities, and schools have about student learning and the very purpose of schools" (Nieto et al, 2008: 176). This definition shares with Boomer the notion that the curriculum's place is in the institution and the classrooms where learning takes place. It also includes students as actors with their own aspirations. Barnett and Coate (2005) in their conceptualisation of university curricula emphasise the importance of students' 'knowing', 'acting' and 'being' within and through curricula, which is consistent with Boomer's emphasis on the student as actor, and students' own development through the curriculum process (principle C).

Stenhouse (1975), very much aware of the difficulties in implementing curriculum innovations in education, formulated his definition of curriculum with much care and many reservations: "A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice". In this definition, we see three important elements: 1. the acceptance that the curriculum is an attempt; 2. the acknowledgement that a curriculum is open for debate and can be improved; 3. the notion that a curriculum consists of principles

transferable into practice (Stenhouse, 1975: 4). Stenhouse suggests that the curriculum needs further development and elaboration within the classroom; which in our view is a prerequisite for student involvement in curriculum negotiation. The parallels between Boomer's principles and Stenhouse's elements two and three are also obvious. The curriculum should provide teachers with general guidelines to further elaborate upon in class by negotiating the curriculum with students. On the classroom level, the curriculum is open for debate.

Clearly the curriculum does not have to be a fixed, prescribed set of content and objectives to be 'delivered'. Once we recognize this, we have reached the point where Pinar argues that curriculum becomes 'currere' (Pinar, 1975: 400). If 'curriculum' in its classical meaning is the (race) course itself, then 'currere' is to run that course i.e. the process. As noted earlier, Boomer used the verb 'curriculuming' to indicate this idea of curriculum as a process.

If we relate the idea of a curriculum as a process with the idea of a negotiated curriculum then it becomes clearer that the curriculum is constructed through education itself and students can be active participants. This reasoning gives the necessary condition for seeing curriculum as a negotiation. Curriculum as a negotiation more than curriculum as a process, values this involvement of students and considers their activities, ideas and decisions as meaningful learning experiences and contributions to the curriculum.

### **3.4 Student voice**

Principle C '*involve collaboration between teacher and student*' emphasises 'seeing students as actors'. Therefore, the curriculum negotiation work by Boomer and colleagues can be related to work by authors from the 'student voice' movement. Student voice has been identified by Sinnema and Aitken (2013) as one out of eight characteristics of various educational renewal efforts within Anglo-Saxon educational systems. It has quite a strong tradition in schools education (Cook-Sather, 2006; Ruddock, 2007). Motives for student voice

in education vary from ethical imperatives, such as the UN International Rights of the Child to participate in decision making on educational decisions that affect him or her within school, to educational rationales where student voice is a way of addressing certain participative and citizenship skills (Bron & Veugelers, 2014b). A common feature in student voice initiatives is that they "view students as knowledgeable and collaborative actors whose insights into, and expertise on, their own ideas, comments, and actions are critical to the development of a full understanding of what transpires and changes at school" (Thiessen & Cook-Sather, 2007: 7-8). Student voice also connects and interweaves with the critical pedagogy movement started around the 1980s (Darder, Baltodano & Torres, 2003; Giroux, 1983). More recently student voice has often been articulated in a less political way, particularly within universities, where student voice frequently refers to "student feedback on teaching often in the form of end of course feedback questionnaires or (...) staff-student liaison committees" (Bovill, 2013: 4-5).

Clearly 'student voice' includes expressing views, participation and influencing decision making. Cook-Sather (2006) has described this as students having 'sound, presence and power' indicating that students should be able to speak and express their thoughts and opinions; that they are given a platform to speak and be listened to; and that they can make a change to their situation by having an active role in decision making. Curriculum negotiation as presented by Boomer, fits with this definition of student agency. Principle C highlights that within the curriculum as process (principle B) students are actors, students are invited to contribute and modify their educational program, thus having sound, presence and power (principle A).

However not all student voice is democratic, it can sometimes tend towards being individualistic, such as in extreme forms of personalised learning. In curriculum negotiation the voices of students are heard within a democratic setting. We found this in the work of Boomer, but also in the classroom negotiation work by Zipin (2013) who focusses on the use of life experience or 'funds of knowledge' into the curriculum to engage students and Breen &



Littlejohn (2000) who see negotiation as the “discussion between all members of the classroom to decide how learning and teaching are to be organised (...) making explicit the typically hidden views of students, the intention is to arrive at more effective, efficient and democratic modes of classroom work” (Breen & Littlejohn, 2000: 1). Importantly, to these authors negotiation is a group process seeking a group outcome, making it classroom or group centred as opposed to the more individualistic ‘learner centred’. Breen and Littlejohn detail a range of decisions open to negotiation: the purpose of the collaborative work; the content or subject matter of the work; the various ways of working together and the preferred means of evaluation. Central to a negotiated approach is the learners' previous experiences, aspirations, expectations and intentions; making them explicit and relating them to the intentions of the teacher are key in informing and transforming the planned curriculum into a negotiated curriculum.

#### **4. Discussion: Boomer's relevance for participative approaches in education**

We have explored the relevance of Boomer's curriculum negotiation model for several current educational debates focused on three key areas: A) the development of a democratic society with a democratic citizenry, B the curriculum as a process, and C) the curriculum as a jointly enacted composition. We elaborate here some conclusions on each of these areas.

A) We conclude that Boomer is far from alone in connecting education, and in particular the curriculum, to a vision of a better, more just and democratic society. Boomer's ideas overlap with other scholars such as Kelly (2009) who argued that a national curriculum should be limited to a set of fundamental principles that educators take as starting point for their planning and evaluation. In this process students are entitled to the right to contribute to the curriculum. Noddings (2013) adds that critical thinking and creativity must be brought back into education. She warns that the current focus on measurement and comparisons leads to competition and that this needs to be replaced by a focus on cooperation and finding creative

solutions to bring our society forward. Finally we presented the work by Apple & Beane (1995) and Beane (1997) on democratic schools. They emphasise questions that include: what knowledge is of most worth, by whom and for whom? Beane's work goes as far as suggesting taking essential questions from students as the starting point in education and thus creating an integrated curriculum that is relevant to students.

It is hard to conclude whether any progress has been made over past decades in introducing negotiation in curriculum development. The current emphasis on measurable outcomes and efficiency in education, seems to lead in the opposite direction. On the other hand we also see renewed attention focused on student voice and democratic citizenship. The work of Kelly, Noddings and Apple and Beane shares with Boomer the notion of a deliberative democracy. This reveals itself in the vision that a national curriculum should be limited to inspiring principles that give direction to co-creation of the curriculum in schools and classes with a strong role for students in this process. To put this into practice requires a paradigm shift moving away from standardization and textbook dominance. In such a context teachers function as professionals with well-developed curriculum development competences. They require professional development to develop clear goals while at the same time work with these goals creatively based on students' input. Students too need to shed their passive roles to become actors negotiating their own curriculum and at least be partly responsible for it. Within higher education, it has been recognised that co-creation of the curriculum requires a shift in the ways in which students and teachers relate to one another and that this requires a breaking away from pedagogical and curricular habits that constrain what is possible. This breaking away can be considered risky by both students and staff. However the curriculum and personal outcomes can be transformational (Cook-Sather et al, 2014; Bovill, Cook-Sather, Felten, Millard & Moore-Cherry, 2015).

As we have argued, the participation of students in curriculum negotiation is an example of practicing democratic principles. Through their participation, students practice democratic skills that are also the focal point of citizenship education. By negotiating with peers and

teachers, students practise and practice cooperation, communication and decision making. This shows the relevance of Boomer's work to these current and important themes in education.

B. Conceptualising the curriculum as a process, is a prerequisite for student – teacher curriculum negotiation. We have shown that the idea of the curriculum as a process instead of a product with detailed prescriptions can also be found in the work of curriculum specialists that look either from the macro perspective of the educational system, like Kelly and Noddings, or from the micro level of the classroom. In all cases a relation is made with the essences of a democratic society such as: there is not one truth (Apple & Beane, 1995; Stenhouse, 1975); a national curriculum can give directions in terms of aims and principles, but should be open to allow practitioners to adapt the curriculum to their context (Kelly, 2009; Noddings, 2013; Eisner, 1979); and there is a role for students to bring valuable insights and add to the relevance of their curriculum (Cook-Sather, 2006; Beane, 1997; Noddings, 2013). Boomer thought and wrote about all three aspects: the development of a democratic society, the important role of teachers and the valuable input from students.

C. Boomer's work can add impetus to the student voice movement. In student voice literature hardly any attention is given to co-creating curricula or curriculum negotiation, the focus is on the school culture and organization or the universities' more formal student feedback mechanisms. One of the characteristics of Boomer's approach is that students should be 'actors' and curriculum development must involve collaboration between teacher and student. This corresponds with student voice work that stresses how students are entitled to the right to participate, that recognises their views should be heard because they contribute valuable perspectives and that they can make changes to their situation.

There are at least two risks with student voice. The first is that students are only allowed to influence rather safe issues such as school decorations, lunch choices or school outings.

The second is that voice is limited to a form of 'representation' where a few engaged students are invited to participate and are regarded as representing the overall voice of students, and which critiques of representation in higher education suggest is not always the case (Little, Locke & Scesa, 2009; Rodgers et al, 2011). Especially critical voices or marginalized students can be left out. These risks of excluding students can be greatly reduced in curriculum negotiation when all students are invited to contribute to an essential aspect of education: the curriculum. It is possible for all students to contribute if curriculum negotiation is organized within a class setting. Still there is the risk of marginalizing critical voices within the negotiation and care needs to be taken in considering the ways students are invited to participate in class in order to ensure that a diversity of students are meaningfully engaged, but at least the basic condition for offering power to all students in the cohort is there. This is especially important if we consider the curriculum negotiation process as an example of developing citizenship qualities. The possibility of enacting negotiation at a practical curriculum level also enables teachers and students to lead this process within the constraints of the existing curricular policy context.

### ***Taking Boomer's principles forward.***

In our own work author 1 and 3 have conducted case studies exploring the possibilities for students to negotiate their curriculum in Dutch and Flemish lower secondary schools. We have chosen for this to take place at the classroom level, so that all students can benefit from the opportunity to experience and develop cooperation, negotiation and decision making. This is important if we regard curriculum negotiation not only from the perspective of the curriculum (the students' input), but also from the perspective of learning citizenship in practice. For these case studies we have designed practical models to collect data about the concrete activities in classrooms to inform and underpin our more theoretical work. In our review of literature we came across two approaches that resemble Boomer's curriculum negotiation approach: the work of Cook and the work of Beane. Boomer's curriculum negotiation approach was developed into a practical pedagogical approach by one of his co-

authors, Jon Cook (1992). Cook outlined four questions we found useful in classroom curriculum negotiation and that we have used in a series of case studies. The set of questions can act as a practical guide to negotiating elements of the curriculum. The questions are as follows:

- “1. What do we know already?
  2. What do we want, and need, to find out?
  3. How will we go about finding out?
  4. How will we know, and show, that we've found out when we've finished?”
- (Cook, 1992: 21).

The first two questions are crucial for determining curriculum content, Cook advises individual learners who are working on these questions, to make notes for themselves by using two columns: one titled 'known', the other, 'unknown'. Learners then form in the format designed by Cook groups to pool ideas. From the start the known and unknown are clarified among the members of the group and the resulting dialogue is the beginning of negotiation and of learning as well. At the third stage the groups come together as a class to exchange ideas and begin negotiating the questions that need to be answered. It is up to the teacher to intercede at this stage and clarify what, if anything, is non-negotiable due to external requirements. The teacher might also ask for proof of what is considered 'known' to verify that the students indeed have the appropriate knowledge and insights. Cook's question three concerns the planning of the work: distribution of tasks, formation of groups, deciding on resources and available time. Finally question four needs to be answered before students get to work. According to Cook, this answer must also be the outcome of negotiation. In this final stage it is also good to have an audience in mind: will students show their findings to their peers, the teacher, parents, employers?

In higher education, Cook's questions look at first glance very similar to Wood's (2003) problem based learning (PBL) steps, used widely in medical education as well as some other

disciplines. However, the emphasis within many PBL curricula in higher education is on the development of critical skills and frequently the content and assessment in the curriculum are pre-set, so the extent to which PBL could be considered a negotiated curriculum is limited. There are increasing numbers of examples of negotiated curriculum in higher education (Mihans, Long & Felten, 2008; Bovill, Aitken, Hutchison, Morrison, Roseweir, Scott & Sotande, 2010; Cook-Sather et al, 2014; Huxham, Hunler, McIntyre, Shilland & McArthur, 2015), but Cook's approach and Boomer's underpinning principles would appear to be under-utilised, perhaps in part due to their origins in schools education. Another reason could be that the origins of PBL are based more in cognitive psychology than in either curriculum studies or a more comprehensive social-constructive view of learning as identity development.

A point of critique to both Cook and Wood's ideas can be that they are of a practical, organisational nature and less founded in theory. Others, like Sellar & Cormack (2009) have looked at the process of redesign in classroom settings from a pedagogical perspective. They describe six recursive pedagogical processes: researching, designing, communicating, transforming, performing and reflecting (Sellar & Cormack, 2009: 127). These processes add to our knowledge about what happens between Cook's steps 3 and 4, but the focus in our work is on Sellar and Cormack's researching and designing phases.

The second model is the collaborative teacher-student curriculum planning found in Beane's work on curriculum integration. Beane, an advocate of democratic education as we saw in paragraph 3.1 and 3.2, argues that a democratic curriculum should be integrated and organized not around subjects but around themes drawn from life as it is being lived and experienced. These themes enable learners to inquire critically into real issues and to pursue social action. "Inquiry and action add depth to the meaning of democracy in schools, which curriculum integration further emphasises through its emphasis on collaborative teacher-student curriculum planning" (Beane, 1997: xi).

We also see this line of thinking from Boomer in principle A (collaborative democracy which values enquiry and negotiation). To engage young people in a collaborative planning process involves two questions: "what questions or concerns do you have about yourself" and "what questions and concerns do you have about the world" (Beane, 1997: 51). These questions are first written down individually and are then shared and discussed within small groups. Then the whole group is given the opportunity to vote for the most relevant questions. After that the planning of the unit starts. This way of working overlaps with Cook's questions 2 and 3. Beane addresses the non-negotiable requirements such as external requirements by way of a question that should always be on the teachers' mind: "what questions or concerns does the world pose to young people that they might not see or know about" (Beane, 1997: 59). A difference between Cook and Beane is that Beane puts the concerns of students first and then looks at what traditional subjects can add to a further exploration of these concerns. Cook's steps are more general and can also be applied with a subject or in relation to a certain theme.

Both Boomer, Cook and Beane describe how students start from what they know already and raise questions they have individually and then as small groups. These are then discussed and negotiated at the classroom level. In addition we found that in Beane's work, students are asked to think of what concerns they have in their personal lives and the concerns they have about society. This has resulted in a number of themes that can function as organizing centres in the curriculum. We consider the distinction between the 'personal' and 'societal' in the work of Beane to be a helpful contribution to the curriculum negotiation approach and especially to the four steps of Cook, because it helps students to think about both the personal and societal aspects of learning.

## **Conclusions**

So what should a negotiated curriculum look like? Boomer explains "One should find, in the first place, a shared detailed understanding between teacher and students of what is going

on, what needs to be done and how it will be done. Secondly, one would find student readiness to ask questions – procedural, substantive and speculative. There would also be group work and whole class reflection/evaluation episodes. A good deal of argument, negotiation and discussion would occur when it came time to evaluate assigned work. The ‘feel’ of the classroom would be one of engaged intentional industry where tension to complete work is self or group-imposed rather than teacher imposed. A litmus test of such a classroom would be that students continued to work purposefully when the teacher left the room” (Boomer, 1992b: 288). We argue that this is the ideal of negotiated curriculum at classroom level and that Boomers ideas are still very relevant in schools and universities today.

When students reflect on previously acquired knowledge and experiences and on what they consider of value in learning, as well as developing and negotiating learning questions with peers and teachers then they develop citizenship qualities and other graduate attributes through practice. We need to explore further what skills, values and attributes students develop when negotiating the curriculum using Boomer's model. In addition we need to explore what the input of students means to the curriculum. Will new perspectives on topics be introduced? Will this depend on the student's personal and social background? Will students consider the curriculum more relevant and engaging if they have taken part in its design?

We consider curriculum negotiation to be an approach that deserves more scholarly attention. Within our own work (author 1 and 3) in lower secondary education in The Netherlands and Flanders, we are gathering case studies where we are searching for evidence about whether: student involvement in curriculum development adds to the quality of the curriculum by bringing in new perspectives and making the curriculum more relevant, and how student participation contributes to development of certain skills. We will report our findings in the future.



Further research is needed to provide more case studies to explore students negotiating their curriculum in schools and universities. We would suggest that Boomer's work still has a great deal to offer that can help to meet some of the aspirations we have to enhance learners' experience, integrate student voices within students' learning experiences and develop a range of citizenship qualities and graduate attributes. The current value of Boomer's work appears to lie in offering a set of democratic values and principles that question the existing power imbalances within education, as well as a practical approach for implementing a negotiated curriculum. As Green stated in 2003 in reference to Boomer's work: "an unfinished project *par excellence*, his work nonetheless remains, to my mind, a crucial reference point in late 20th-century curriculum inquiry in Australia" (Green, 2003: 126), and we would argue this relevance stretches internationally and to all levels of education. The concept of curriculum negotiation can link curriculum development with students' active participation and it can challenge both curriculum theory and learning theory.

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